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Responsible Wellbeing and its Implications for Development Policy

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Chloe Blackmore¹

Abstract

Robert Chambers' concept of 'responsible wellbeing' remains under-explored. This paper examines the relationships between 'wellbeing' and 'responsibility' and explores the implications of the concept for development policy. It argues that the concept can complement the development agenda by highlighting political and power relationships between the rich and the poor. By turning the development spotlight towards the powerful and wealthy, responsible wellbeing brings personal agency to centre stage and offers a holistic approach for dealing with issues of environmental and social justice. Despite inevitable challenges in encouraging people to confront their wealth and power, the paper recommends a two-fold policy approach: 1) a focus on education and critical pedagogy, and 2) appropriate measures to support people to make more responsible choices.

Key words: responsible wellbeing, power, responsibility, poverty, critical pedagogy

1. Introduction

Development policy has typically focused on problems of hunger, conflict and poverty in developing countries; that is the problems facing '*poor*' people. However, in an increasingly interconnected world, it is likely that the problems of poverty and destitution are associated not with shortage, but with excess. As Lummis so nicely puts it, 'the problem of the world's poor, defined more accurately, turns out to be a problem of the world's rich' (Lummis 1992 in Goulet 1995: 131). Overconsumption in the West is depleting the world's resources and creating massive waste, often at the expense of impoverished people across the world (Durning 1995). This seems obvious, yet raises the question of why the behaviour of the rich has not received more attention in development, especially since it is they who command the power and resources necessary to bring about change.

Given the current urgency surrounding climate change and the persistence of poverty and inequality across the world, there is growing exigency to turn attention to the behaviour of those with wealth and power, and to work together to find shared solutions to social and

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environmental injustice. Certainly there are numerous initiatives designed to raise awareness among individuals and promote behavioural change in the West, for example, the Fair Trade movement, anti-sweatshop campaigns (e.g. Clean Clothes Campaign), Make Poverty History and the Live Simply movement, to name just a few. However, concepts underpinning such behavioural change have, until recently, received little academic theorising, and remain relatively low down on the development agenda.

In an attempt to address this conceptual void, Robert Chambers (1997) proposes the term ‘responsible wellbeing’ to centralise the personal dimension in development and emphasise the role of the rich and powerful in sustaining injustice, as well as their capacity to bring about change. However, despite the potential of responsible wellbeing, the term has not taken off and has stimulated only limited discussion within development studies. After introducing Chambers’ concept of responsible wellbeing, breaking it down into its components, the paper draws on the wider literature in order to carry out a critical analysis of the relationships between responsibility and wellbeing. In doing so, it explores its implications for policy.

2. Chambers’ responsible wellbeing

Combining locally-defined concepts of wellbeing with personal responsibility, Robert Chambers (1997) coined the term responsible wellbeing. The term ‘recognizes obligations to others, both those alive and future generations, and to their quality of life.’ (Chambers 2005: 193-194). It acknowledges that everyone, rich or poor, has agency and associated responsibilities, and our (in)actions have widespread wellbeing implications at personal, national and global levels. The concept was formulated largely as a reflection on the behaviour and actions of development practitioners, policy makers and government officials, i.e. those with power in the field of development, but as Chambers himself implies, the concept has significance for us all as citizens. The extent to which individuals have agency, however, varies with wealth and power, and thus our responsibilities and obligations also vary accordingly. Responsible wellbeing is about using agency, about doing as well as being, in a responsible way to bring about good change. Although the concept remains fairly loosely defined, Chambers highlights the importance of equity and sustainability as key principles of responsible wellbeing: ‘When wellbeing is qualified by equity and sustainability it becomes responsible wellbeing’ (Chambers 2005: 193). While seemingly counterintuitive in an economic paradigm where consumption and competition are key, the idea of responsible wellbeing suggests that equity and sustainability do not come as a cost to wellbeing and do

not have to conflict with our personal goals. On the contrary, Chambers posits that our wellbeing is actually enhanced when it contributes to equity and sustainability.

The ideas embodied in responsible wellbeing are not new. Responsible wellbeing echoes the work of many philosophers who concern themselves with ethics of development, and resonates with many religious teachings. For example, Denis Goulet (1995) talks of strategic principles in development – to ‘have enough’ in order to ‘be more’ – a notion which captures the idea that excessive consumption is not conducive to the ‘good life’. Giri and van Ufford (2003) talk about development as shared responsibility, a responsibility which is facilitated through appropriate self-development and reflective thinking. Moreover, most religions teach that taking responsibility for one’s actions and acting sensitively towards others and towards the environment will bring a sense of fulfilment. The Buddhist virtue of ‘responsibleness’ is thought to be essential for one’s wellbeing (Cooper and James 2005), for example. However, responsible wellbeing can mean different things for different people depending on culture or religion, and in order to better understand the ideas behind it, its two components are now examined separately.

Wellbeing

The term ‘wellbeing’ is used in numerous ways and contexts, and because of this, it is difficult to define. Chambers (2005: 193) describes wellbeing as the ‘experience of good quality of life’. A discussion of what is meant by a ‘good life’ is beyond the scope of this paper, and depends on culturally-specific meanings, values and beliefs. Nevertheless, ideas about the ‘good life’ draw upon one of the most common distinctions made in the academic wellbeing literature: the distinction between hedonic and eudaimonic accounts of wellbeing. The hedonic approach focuses on happiness and defines wellbeing in terms of maximising pleasure and avoiding pain. Eudaimonia on the other hand extends beyond this, capturing the idea of human flourishing based on worthwhile engagement and realisation of true potential. (Ryan and Deci 2001). Eudaimonic accounts highlight depth, meaning and community engagement as important attributes to a flourishing human life. Although the hedonic/eudaimonic distinction is complex, the idea of responsible wellbeing seems to resonate strongly with eudaimonia, embracing wellbeing as worthiness rather than happiness and pleasure. Building from eudaimonic accounts of wellbeing, this paper takes the view that a fulfilling life is one which is engaged wholeheartedly in intrinsically worthwhile activities.

The University of Bath research group on wellbeing in developing countries (WeD) emphasise three distinct but interrelated dimensions of wellbeing – the subjective, the material and the relational (White 2009). Likewise, Chambers (2005: 193) points to the multi-dimensional nature of wellbeing, suggesting that it is ‘open to the whole range of human experience, social, psychological and spiritual as well as material’. This holistic notion of wellbeing is firmly grounded in the person, taking account of personal needs and perceptions. Far from being individualistic, however, wellbeing takes a view of the person as firmly grounded in social context. Social context is important in shaping people’s goals and perceptions, and also adds meaning to relationships (McGregor 2007). The three dimensions of wellbeing may be regarded as universal, but are fulfilled in locally-defined and culturally-specific ways.

One of the hallmarks of the wellbeing approach in development is its positive focus, and its appreciation of what people can do and be, i.e. their strengths rather than their weaknesses (White 2009). Wellbeing is thus a way of living, a multi-dimensional process, in which people lead flourishing lives. It is about ‘developing as a person, being fulfilled, and making a contribution to the community’ (Marks and Shah 2004: 2). So conceived, wellbeing almost becomes responsible by implication. This begs the question of what the ‘responsible’ term adds to the concept.

Personal Responsibility

Every (in)action has implications for other people and for environments, and therefore the ability to act (agency) brings with it certain responsibilities. The term ‘responsible’ carries with it numerous moral connotations and is associated with a sense of duty and obligation. Such terminology is often couched in negative overtones and may seem to detract from, or contradict, the positive charge associated with wellbeing. However, ‘responsibility’ does not have to be associated with negatives and can be used in many different ways (Matravers 2007). One of the most common distinctions in political philosophy is that between positive and negative responsibility. Negative responsibility is ‘to be guilty or at fault for having caused a harm and without valid excuse’ (Young 2006: 119), and may helpfully be understood as the ‘stop harming’ agenda, to use Green’s (2008) terminology. For example, ‘stop harming’ refers to responsibility to stop consuming in excess or throwing out so much waste. However, responsibility can also be used in a more optimistic sense to refer to ‘agents carrying out activities in a morally appropriate way and aiming for certain outcomes’ (Young

2006: 119). Positive responsibility refers to an active solidarity in order to bring about change, for example campaigning, raising awareness, and encouraging others to follow an example. Green (2008) calls this the ‘start helping’ agenda.

Responsibility therefore encompasses a broad range of behaviours (including positive and negative) and there are many ways in which citizens can discharge their responsibilities, for example by buying ethically-produced clothes, speaking up against injustice and discrimination, eating a vegetarian diet, reusing and recycling, buying Fair Trade products, or even engaging in self-critical reflection and becoming aware of the implications of (in)actions (positive responsibility), and reducing consumption and reducing waste (negative responsibility). By making choices about how we behave, we each have the power to change things.

Since everyone has agency, and the ability to act or not act, everyone has both positive and negative responsibility. However, this can be assigned in different ways. As Chambers (2005: 194) notes, ‘the word “responsible” has moral force in proportion to wealth and power: the wealthier and more powerful people are, the greater the actual or potential impact of their actions or inactions, and so the greater the scope and need for their wellbeing to be responsible’. In *World Poverty and Human Rights*, Thomas Pogge (2002) develops a causal link between world poverty and the conduct of citizens in wealthy countries. While acknowledging that institutional arrangements, national governments and international organisations are partly responsible for poverty, Pogge (2002: 21) argues that ‘...global economic arrangements designed and imposed by our governments are indirectly our responsibility. These governments are elected by us, responsive to our interests and preferences, acting in our name and in ways that benefit us’. Responsibility for averting poverty and environmental damage is shared by everyone, by governments, and, when political leaders fail to discharge their responsibilities, by us, the citizens (Wenar 2007). Thus, responsibility can be assigned according to who is at fault and who has ability to act.

Responsibility can also be assigned by virtue of living together in an increasingly interconnected world, where our actions and inactions affect our local and global neighbours and our environments. The social connection model assigns shared responsibility for structural injustice to individuals on the basis that they contribute, in a partial way, by their actions to the processes that produce unjust outcomes (Young 2006: 119). This responsibility

derives from ‘belonging together with others in a system of interdependent processes of cooperation and competition through which we seek benefits and aim to realise projects’ (*ibid.*). Given ever-heightened global interconnectedness, Chambers writes of a rise in agency and correspondingly of responsibility, as we become ‘more able to exert influence than before’ (2005: 203). Thus, ‘responsibility’ can be assigned in multiple ways, both according to ability to act and of living together with others.

Responsible wellbeing

At first glance, the concepts of ‘responsibility’ and ‘wellbeing’ may not appear to sit comfortably together. One has negative connotations; the other is explicitly positive, meanwhile a focus on ‘responsible behaviour’ carries explicitly moral overtones (White, *pers. comm.* 28.05.09). Nevertheless, while some conceptions of wellbeing may indeed be intrinsically responsible (i.e. eudaimonia), other perceptions focus more on happiness and pleasure attainment, and therefore an explicit emphasis on responsibility is necessary and may help to clear the field between competing notions of wellbeing. In recombining the terms ‘wellbeing’ and ‘responsibility’, responsible wellbeing embodies a way of living, not dissimilar to the Aristotelian concept of eudaimonia. In taking responsibility (i.e. stopping harming and starting to help), the term implies that people will lead more fulfilling, less imposing lives and in doing so set an example to others.

3. When responsibility brings wellbeing

This section aims to explore the relationships between wellbeing and responsibility in more detail: does responsibility bring wellbeing, or do the concepts conflict? Since there are very few studies, if any, engaging with responsible behaviour per se, this paper will look at elements of responsible behaviour such as ecologically-responsible behaviours, frugality and pro-social behaviours in order to explore the links between responsibility and wellbeing.

Relationships between responsibility and wellbeing

Using the WeD framework as a starting point, responsibility (both positive and negative) seems to cut across the multiple dimensions of wellbeing by creating a sense of purpose or meaning and fostering a moral sense of ‘feeling right’ (subjective wellbeing), promoting social interaction and solidarity (relational wellbeing), improving physical health and preserving environmental resources (material wellbeing). Taking responsibility can, however, sometimes be highly stressful. Among the most commonly cited costs are time pressures and

frustration or feelings of helplessness at the lack of accomplishment (Chinman and Wandersman 1999). These costs to responsibility concern not only individuals themselves, but also their families and communities who have to support them in all sorts of ways. Figure 1 illustrates the possible wellbeing benefits and costs of responsibility, with each of the dimensions explained in the text below.

Figure 1: Wellbeing benefits and costs of personal responsibility

Wellbeing Dimension	Benefits of responsibility	Costs of responsibility
Subjective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - sense of purpose or meaning - sense of morality, doing the <i>right</i> thing - sense of being in control - improved mental health 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - sense of frustration or helplessness at lack of progress or immensity of tasks - feelings of concern about social, environmental issues - unsatisfactory answers regarding meaning in life - reduced mental health due to stress
Relational	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - solidarity with global community - social integration - social acceptance and social approval - feelings of safety/security 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - compromises in relationships with family/friends - marginalisation in one's personal and work life - extra pressures on family/friends
Material	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - preserving resources for all - learning new skills - improved physical health - natural and physical environmental resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - lack of time - reduced physical health

Subjective wellbeing

The subjective dimension of wellbeing is concerned with people's cultural values, ideologies and beliefs, and their perceptions of their own lives (White 2009). Responsible behaviour may be important for subjective wellbeing in many ways. In a quantitative study Brown and Kasser (2005) asked participants to rate their feelings on a scale ranging from 'very happy' to 'very unhappy', alongside the frequency with which they perform a range of positive environmental behaviours, such as turning off lights, reusing plastic bags. Using these indicators, they found ecologically-responsible behaviour to be positively correlated with subjective wellbeing. This seems to suggest that responsible behaviour has benefits for subjective wellbeing. Such methodology, however, provides a relatively narrow assessment of subjective wellbeing and ecologically-responsible behaviour and is perhaps in danger of missing some of the diversity in perceptions of responsibility.

Research into pro-social behaviours suggests that responsible behaviour might be important for a number of different reasons. Community service and volunteer work are found to contribute to subjective wellbeing through increased self-esteem, greater life satisfaction and a greater sense of control (c.f. Thoits and Hewitt 2001). When people engage responsibly and simultaneously experience success, they begin to appreciate their own skills and abilities to change things. This can boost self-confidence and foster a sense of competence, fulfilling an important psycho-social need (Ryan and Deci 2001). Furthermore, in a study of lifestyle pioneers Degenhardt (2002) found that taking responsibility for one's behaviour is closely connected with the motive to find meaning in life. Finding consequence and purpose is important in contributing to the subjective dimension of wellbeing, since it creates a sense of devoting one's life to important tasks. However, the extent to which taking responsibility helps to find purpose or meaning in life depends upon cultural values and what is considered to be important in a particular society. Similarly, WeD research found that living a good and honest life was extremely important to people (Camfield 2006). This sense of morality is fundamentally linked to one's relationships with others, and engaging responsibly with others and with the environment could be important in contributing to this sense of 'feeling right'.

However, engaging in responsible behaviours is not always easy and can be stressful, especially when people feel helpless or experience frustration at the lack of progress or enormity of the challenges they face. This can lead to 'burn-out' or reduced subjective wellbeing and is perhaps most likely when the problems posed by the project are very difficult or even unsolvable. Given the intractability of social and environmental problems around the world, burnout is a possibility. In a qualitative assessment of the effects of eco-activism on wellbeing Sohr (2001) found instances of 'burnout' or reduced wellbeing when people overexert themselves or are unsuccessful in their endeavours to 'make a difference'.

Relational wellbeing

Many pro-social activities or activities related to environmental activism take place in social contexts – with other people, in community groups and organisations. Contact with like-minded people is thought to be important for fulfilling relational dimensions of wellbeing, and participants may therefore be expected to enhance their wellbeing through social interaction. Eigner (2001) describes the experience of being active together with others as very satisfying and Keyes (1998) suggests that the pursuit of broader societal goals and the feeling of contributing to society might be important for fulfilling social aspects of wellbeing.

This feeling of contributing to wider social goals and working together may help to increase solidarity within the global community. In addition, endorsing responsible wellbeing might be important in gaining social approval and in assigning social status (Piliavin 2002); particularly as social and environmental problems become matters of increasing urgency.

However, engaging in responsible behaviours may also lead to compromises with family and social life. Many pro-social activities such as campaigning and activism are time consuming, and require ongoing commitment and dedication, leaving limited time for family and friends. Even behaviours such as cycling to work rather than driving might take more time leading to pressures in relational wellbeing. These ideas remain under-explored and more research is therefore required in order to expand upon them.

Material wellbeing

The material dimension of wellbeing incorporates assets (material, physical, natural, financial), welfare and standards of living (White 2009). Although personal responsibility may not intuitively be linked to material wellbeing, especially since the attainment of financial assets is often associated with competition and pursuit of self-interest, there are nevertheless irrefutable links. Living responsibly helps to ensure a sustained supply of assets for everyone both now and in the future, as well as ensuring that common property resources such as the natural environment remain intact. Schor's (1998) study of 'downshifters' also shows that approximately one fifth of the American population is happily living on less, and Kasser (2002) also suggests that consuming less and living simply can increase wellbeing. Although some level of material consumption is indisputably necessary to satisfy our basic needs, excessive consumption can be damaging for subjective wellbeing, leaving individuals feeling empty and hollow. Moreover, some studies suggest that physical health might be enhanced either through direct engagement in responsible behaviours such as volunteer work (c.f. Thoits and Hewitt 2001), or indirectly through reduced inequality and improved social relations (Wilkinson 2005). People who engage in volunteer activities may also have the opportunity to learn new skills, thus increasing their human capital and employment opportunities.

Nevertheless, it is difficult for people to live responsibly without supportive structures in society, without options for using public transport, cycle lanes and supportive policies to allow people to combine voluntary work with other pursuits. It is possible that some of the

tensions between wellbeing and responsibility may be resolved with greater support for lifestyle change. Section five will consider some of the implications of responsible wellbeing for development policy.

The section has discussed some of the possible links between wellbeing and responsibility, showing that responsibility can have both positive and negative effects on wellbeing. While tentative at this stage, it seems that responsible living may have ‘double dividends’. Taking responsibility, as well as having beneficial consequences for the environment and for society, also seems to have certain benefits for subjective, relational and material dimensions of wellbeing. Responsibility can be fulfilling. Aligning responsibility with wellbeing in this way, and portraying responsible behaviours as beneficial, may have promising implications for development policy and for motivating people to lead sustainable lifestyles. People are more likely to do something if it is perceived to be advantageous rather than burdensome. Evident, however, is the dearth of comprehensive analysis of responsibility and wellbeing. Although this initial overview seems to suggest that responsibility and wellbeing are closely related, there is nothing to determine the direction of this causation, or explore the wellbeing costs and benefits in detail. Additional research would help to elucidate the relationships, and further explore the potential of the concept of responsible wellbeing.

4. Responsible wellbeing in international development discourse

This section aims to take a closer look at some of the potential benefits of the concept of responsible wellbeing for development discourse, together with some of the potential difficulties with using the concept.

Turning the development lens towards relationships between the rich and impoverished

Despite the huge amount of research into poverty, the poor are almost invariably studied in relative isolation from local and global society. This leads to processes of ‘othering’ where ‘they’ (the impoverished/marginalised) are perceived as different from ‘us’ (the wealthy/powerful) (van Ufford *et al* 2003). In development studies, the focus has largely been on ‘them’, and ‘we’, the rich and powerful, have largely been neglected. However, the concept of responsible wellbeing explicitly helps to turn the development lens towards the development industry itself and toward the rich, rather than the poor. As discussed in the introduction, it seems that development has taken the wrong people as its starting point. Development should also be grounded in the West: developing *ourselves* as well as poor

people *out there*. Recognition of this need to focus attention on the powerful has already occurred in gender studies where, men now receive greater consideration in research and interventions (Cornwall and White 2000 in Chambers 2006).

Although traditionally neglected, these relationships (economic, political and social) between rich and poor are well understood. According to dependency theory, the capitalist system is structured so as to serve the interests of the West, generating prosperity and overdevelopment at the expense of underdevelopment in other parts of the world (Gunder Frank 1966). The non-poor may be largely unaware that their actions are implicated in the causation of poverty, but they are (inadvertently perhaps) contributing to an exploitative system. Consequently Øyen (1996) speaks of ‘an urgent need to develop a more realistic paradigm where the focus is shifted to the non-poor part of the population’. Rather than simply shifting focus from poor to rich, however, responsible wellbeing provides a potential answer to Øyen’s call through inclusivity. Responsible wellbeing is as relevant for development practitioners as it is for both wealthy and poor citizens. With its focus on way of life rather than poverty, responsible wellbeing provides a common framework which places the developers and developing, the self and other, together under one roof, dislodging the ‘othering’ perspectives which, as van Ufford *et al* (2003) discuss, have become firmly entrenched in development discourse. By highlighting that the wealth and power of some is causally linked to the impoverishment of others, consumption in the West can be considered in the same frame as ‘poverty’.

This emphasis on relationships situates individuals and communities within society, and challenges us to ‘consider how we are to live *together*’ (McGregor 2007). As well as how we are to live together in our local communities, of particular relevance here is how we are to live together in the global community. Our ability to live together depends to a large extent on the perceived legitimacy of the people with power in both local and global realms (*ibid.*). In accordance with its principles of equity and sustainability, responsible wellbeing calls for a redistribution of wealth and power, and represents a potential way of achieving legitimacy and a possible solution for how we might live together.

Bringing agency to centre stage

Much development research has traditionally focused on institutions to the relative neglect of the personal dimension - including personal values, attitudes and beliefs (Drèze and Sen 2002). Chambers recognises that this personal dimension is missing from development, and

the idea that people can change and can make a difference is core to the concept of responsible wellbeing. The concept implies that we have to engage not only with the conventionally defined agenda of development 'out there', but with ourselves, how we think, how we change, what we do and how we do it. Other thinkers in development are also beginning to acknowledge the importance of personal change and the need to question our values and attitudes. For example, Michael Edwards (2004: 213) talks about institutional reform through personal revolution and recognises that 'institutions change when people do'. This growing emphasis on personal change and agency is also reflected in the work of the labour party government as well as many non-governmental organisations in initiatives which promote active citizenship. A member of Oxfam attributes a central role of active citizens: 'they alone can deliver the kinds of social and political structures needed to make development serve the poorest individuals and communities' (Green 2008: 429).

Debates between agency and structure are incredibly complex and cannot be adequately dealt with here. Durkheim famously argued that social structures (the material, social and cultural contexts in which we live) constrain and influence what we do, but despite these pressures over our behaviour, other sociologists, notably Giddens, emphasise our individual agency and ability to make choices. One - not unproblematic - way of understanding the interplay between 'structure' and 'action' is Giddens' (1984) 'structuration theory'. Structuration theory posits that individuals actively make and remake social structures during the course of everyday activities. It is based on the premise that it is individual action which changes the structures in society, although social structures also influence individual behaviour. For example, most people are influenced by the fashion industry and the desire to follow seasonal trends. In buying cheap, mass-produced clothes to keep up with the latest styles, each person contributes in a minor way to the existence of that system. However, the fashion system would not exist without human beings, and as human beings, we are all free to make choices about what we wear and whether we opt for more expensive, ethically-produced clothes. One individual's decision to buy ethical clothing may only have a small impact on the sweatshop industry as a whole, but if everyone, or even the majority, decided to avoid buying clothes produced in appalling conditions, managers would soon be forced to improve dire working conditions. Whilst not denying the influences which social structures such as fashion have over our behaviour, individuals can bring about change through their actions and through providing a positive role model for others to follow.

Although acknowledgement of the personal agency in development may, on the surface, appear to align responsible wellbeing closely with liberal democratic ideas of society in which individuals form the focus of policy interventions (Bornstein 2005: 123), this would be a misinterpretation. Responsible wellbeing, rather than focusing solely on individuals, actually works to situate people within society. In confronting issues of social and environmental injustice, it is concerned with connecting our individual choices with wider societal goals of sustainability and equity. In this sense, responsible wellbeing addresses some of the tensions between individualistic and social notions of development and wellbeing. Nevertheless, caution is needed when using the concept to ensure that responsibility is not simply shifted to individuals, but recognises the need to work with social institutions too. The emphasis on agency therefore complements (rather than replaces) more structural approaches and recognises that both types of interventions are necessary for successful development.

Bringing politics back in

Development has traditionally tended to depoliticise poverty and social injustice, issues which are essentially political problems. James Ferguson (1990) describes it as the ‘anti-politics machine’. By construing poverty as an individual or household condition, much poverty research and development practice ignores the structures and social processes involved in the accumulation and distribution of wealth (Harriss 2007). Furthermore, researchers and policy makers tend to emphasise global poverty rather than inequality, another political move which again helps to sustain domestic privilege and leave the legitimacy of the world order unquestioned (Nederveen Pieterse 2002). These tricks for depoliticising poverty often divert attention away from powerful figures, permitting them to shirk their moral responsibilities to intervene and bring about change.

Responsible wellbeing, however, directs attention directly *towards* power relations, by emphasising the need for the powerful to take responsibility and use their power to empower rather than dominate. By bringing attention to the role of powerful development actors, and powerful citizens, responsible wellbeing identifies the roots of poverty, social deprivation and environmental degradation in power and class differences. In doing so it has the potential to challenge the apparatus of the ‘anti-politics machine’. It shows how the pursuit of prosperity by some results in the denial of wellbeing opportunities for others, and challenges those with wealth and power, i.e. those who are able to do something, to become morally responsible.

Nevertheless, issues concerning power are notoriously difficult to further. The fact that ‘responsible wellbeing discomforts and exposes those of us who are “haves” for what we do and leave undone’ (Chambers 2005: 202), might explain why the term has not, as yet, taken off. For these reasons, some have questioned the usefulness of responsible wellbeing, proposing alternative labels such as thoughtful wellbeing or humane wellbeing (Gasper, *pers. comm.*, 2008). However, the attention which responsible wellbeing affords to power dynamics and unequal socio-economic relationships involved in the production and reproduction of poverty is undeniably important.

Combining broad ethical agendas

The links between responsible behaviour and wellbeing have already begun to be investigated and co-opted by the environmental agenda (c.f. Marks *et al* 2006: 15). For example, access to green spaces is found to have a positive effect on psychological well-being, while airborne pollutants and localised environmental damage are thought to impact negatively (Newton 2007). Terms such as sustainable wellbeing (Marks *et al* 2006), sustainable consumption (Jackson 2005) and sustainable lifestyles (Evans and Jackson 2007) are therefore making their way into the development lexicon. These concepts show significant parallels with responsible wellbeing and embody similar ideas. Although in many people’s minds they have taken on an explicitly environmental focus, this is to the relative neglect of social, economic, political and cultural issues.

Nevertheless, given the overlaps between environmental concerns and issues of social justice, it makes no sense to separate these issues. For example, the 2007/2008 Human Development Report *Fighting Climate Change: Solidarity in a Divided World* discusses how intimately climate change is linked to social justice. These are really two sides of the same coin – both caused by the greed and drive for consumption in the West. The report details how developing countries face far greater risks from climate change because they are more exposed to intense climate related hazards and less well equipped to deal with shocks. Issues of environmental and social justice are therefore intricately connected, and both require immediate attention. In challenging the growth paradigm in development responsible wellbeing embraces broad but interconnected ethical issues of social justice and inequality as well as environmental issues such as climate change. Responsible wellbeing is concerned with issues of intergenerational, intragenerational and environmental justice. It recognises that issues of environmental and social justice are inseparable and offers a holistic approach

for guiding development policy – one agenda for both environmental and social issues rather than multiple agendas leading to confusion and inefficiency. Nevertheless, the momentum built by the environmental agenda, and the urgency which has come to surround environmental issues such as climate change, could be advantageous, providing a useful backdrop for bringing in the notion of responsible wellbeing and putting issues of social justice firmly in the picture (McGregor, *pers. comm.*, 2008).

Responsible wellbeing seems to offer several potential benefits to the development agenda. Perhaps key is the focus it affords to development industry itself and to the rich and powerful, thus bringing a potential shift in the people targeted in development policy.

5. Implications for policy

However, is the concept of responsible wellbeing workable, especially in competitive market societies where the market reinforces a bias for short-term self-interest? Stimulating behavioural change in order to encourage people to live more responsibly is never going to be easy. One of the challenges of operationalising the concept of responsible wellbeing is epitomised in the personal dilemma described by Offer (2006), a dilemma which concerns the reconciliation of immediate desires with the commitment required to achieve more remote societal objectives. The major question then, is how to promote responsible wellbeing? What kinds of policies could governments introduce to encourage responsible wellbeing among their citizens? This paper recommends a two-fold policy approach incorporating both structural changes and personal action: 1) supportive structures which allow people to live responsibly and sustainably within their communities; 2) education for responsibility/critical pedagogy in which citizens are encouraged to think critically and reflect on their lives in order to internalise the concept of responsible wellbeing and define it for themselves.

The first point concerns the structures in society which enable individuals to live more responsibly and sustainably and exercise their own agency towards this end. There are many measures which governments can implement - and indeed already are implementing - in order to make it easier for citizens to make better choices and lead more responsible and sustainable lifestyles. These include affordable and efficient public transport networks, user-friendly cycle networks and cycle hire schemes, energy-saving schemes, recycling/composting schemes and progressive tax schemes. These are just some of the things which governments (could) do to support people to make choices conducive to responsible

wellbeing. However, there is a limit to what governments can deliver on behalf of citizens without their active engagement. Research suggests that people are most likely to achieve sustained behavioural change when they decide to do so of their own accord, that is, when motivation is self-determined rather than coerced (Schmuck and Schultz 2002). So government policies are more likely to be effective when people internalise the concept of responsible wellbeing and define it for themselves in ways which have meaning for them.

As Chambers suggests, responsible wellbeing implies engaging in personal reflection and trying to understand ourselves and change what we do. We have to *learn* to live responsibly, through a learning process or a 'pedagogy of the non-oppressed', which focuses on critical and reflective thinking in order to enable us to overturn our thoughts and act differently (Chambers 2005: 195). Critical pedagogic approaches are notably missing from the field of development (Pettit 2006). Policies that provide opportunities for critical thinking and reflection place due emphasis on personal agency, in contrast to more traditional structural approaches, thus representing a potentially influential area for investment as discussed below.

Education for responsible wellbeing: A pedagogy for the non-oppressed?

Much of the philosophy behind critical pedagogy, including Chambers' pedagogy for the non-oppressed' draws heavily on the work of Brazilian educationalist Paulo Freire (1970/1996). His *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* advocates for a teaching philosophy based upon the concept of *praxis* - a combination of action and reflection - in which oppressed students are encouraged to critique and question the world in order to reach a new critical consciousness, enabling them to expose and change oppressive social structures. Interaction and participation, dialogue and problem posing, are central to his pedagogy. Freirean pedagogy has already been applied to non-poor audiences and has been used to confront and transform abuses of wealth and power (Kimmel 2003; van Gorder 2007). In the first qualitative study of applications of Freirean pedagogy to privileged contexts, Curry-Stevens (2007) proposes a two-part model for a pedagogy for the non-oppressed (or pedagogy of the privileged in her terms): 1) a confidence-shaking process in which learners gain a deep awareness of their privilege and begin to understand and accept their complicity in oppression, and 2) a confidence-building process where the focus of the pedagogy shifts towards action planning in an effort to develop personal agency and support learners to make sustained commitments. This provides a useful framework for exploring the potential of the 'Global Citizenship Education' in the UK as a pedagogy for the non-oppressed.

Global Citizenship Education as pedagogy for the non-oppressed

Schools are an obvious place to start educating people for responsibility. NGOs have pressed for a 'Global Citizenship Education', which draws on critical pedagogy and shares many similarities with responsible wellbeing, thus representing a possible model for pedagogy for the non-oppressed. Global Citizenship Education advocates for the integration of global social justice and environmental issues into mainstream schooling, across a variety of curriculum subjects. It aims to develop knowledge, skills and values, as well as action, to enable children to develop into responsible global citizens. It focuses on rights and responsibilities, power relationships, causes of poverty, and lifestyles for a sustainable world (Oxfam 2006). There are thus many crossovers between global citizenship and responsible wellbeing.

Many Global Citizenship Education texts and curriculum guidance documents reflect critical pedagogic methods and make reference to Freirean pedagogy. For example, ActionAid's *Get Global* (2003) and Oxfam's *Education for Global Citizenship* (2006) both emphasise skills of enquiry, participation and reflection. This pupil-centred, empowering pedagogy is key in helping students understand the issues around them and develop an appreciation of their privilege ('confidence-shaking'), as well as supporting them to fulfil their potentials and engage actively in making sustained change ('confidence-building'), something on which ActionAid is particularly strong.

However, despite the potential of Global Citizenship Education to encourage pupils to think about their responsibilities and act on them accordingly, there remain several contradictions and problems. According to both teachers and pupils, Global Citizenship Education occupies insufficient time and place within the National Curriculum and suffers from a lack of resources (Davies 2006). Its ethos of sustainability and equality is also at odds with the performance-driven, examination-focused pedagogic culture of schools. This limits schools' potential to develop the authentic critical thinking and participation required to achieve a deep awareness of social justice and motivation to be responsible (Marshall 2005; Davies 2006). Moreover, the school system places undue emphasis on competition to the relative neglect of values such as compassion and sustainability. Timetabling and resource issues therefore represent core issues in developing critical pedagogy. Working more closely with community organisations which operate beyond the confines of the National Curriculum may

also provide greater scope for learners to develop personal agency and make more sustained commitments in line with responsible wellbeing.

6. Conclusion

By engaging in a thorough examination of responsible wellbeing, this paper has attempted to explore the concept and its implications for development policy. Perhaps its major attribute is the attention it affords to the rich and powerful in development. Responsible wellbeing recognises that the wellbeing of rich and poor people is tightly interconnected, thereby showing that a focus on poor countries bears little meaning in isolation from wider social, economic and political systems. Learning from this, development policy should therefore take developed nations as its target as much as poor nations, and interventions should reflect this, perhaps through education and structural changes.

Responsibility seems to have both benefits and costs for wellbeing, and although the two concepts are intricately interrelated, further research is needed to elucidate these relationships. If positive links are found between the concepts, there may be significant policy implications for promoting responsible and sustainable living: the adoption of responsible behaviours is likely to be more successful and sustained if responsibility has beneficial consequences for individuals, as well as society. Thus, despite potential difficulties concerning the take-up of the idea and the danger of being portrayed as individualistic, there appears to be justification for further research between the concepts of wellbeing and responsibility.

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